



2009 Music Group Performance GA 3: Aural and written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The format of the paper was consistent with the guidelines in the sample examination material on the VCAA website <www.vcaa.vic.edu.au> and comprised of a total of 97 marks across three sections. Students had to answer nine of the ten questions, with the option of responding to either Question 9 (Part-writing) or Question 10 (Improvisation) in Section C. It was encouraging to note that more students attempted the entire paper and the overall standard of results had improved. The median score increased from 47 per cent to 55 per cent.

As in previous years, many students were unable to achieve equal results across all areas of the examination. However, in general, all areas of music literacy and aural perception continue to improve.

Students should be advised to use a sharp pencil for Section A, especially for melody and rhythm transcription tasks, as responses that are illegible cannot be awarded marks.

Examination technique

Many students still did not read and fully understand the questions. In Sections B and C many students' responses were either 'generic' or directly relevant to questions from previous years' papers. Such responses invariably did not answer the questions on this examination. It is strongly recommended that students do not attempt to 'second-guess' what will be on the examination and/or prepare responses beforehand then attempt to 'reshape' them for the questions asked.

Many students planned their responses, for example, through a series of key words linked by arrows, which helped jog their memory and keep them 'on task'. Many of the high-achieving students highlighted (and/or underlined) exactly what was required in each part of each question so that, once they had read and analysed the question, they were able to use these highlighted/underlined components to present a succinct, salient, focused and well-organised response. Most of the stronger students used dot points for most responses, which assisted in presenting clear, deliberate and cogent comments and arguments.

Students and teachers need to be aware that the instrument (or voice) played by the student can have a significant bearing on their overall ability to respond to particular questions. Care should be taken to ensure that all students develop the required skills, particularly in relation to aspects of key knowledge that are less familiar to them. For example, while singers might use their performance experience to write perceptively about characteristics of melody, they may need to spend time developing skills in learning and using music language associated with harmony. While drummers might be able to identify and describe features of rhythm easily, they may need to develop skills in analysing and describing characteristics of melodies. In the same way, guitarists who habitually use tab may need to focus on developing skills in reading and writing pitch notation, and single-line players may need to focus on identifying and analysing relationships between parts. Students who generally perform fully notated music may need to develop their ability to identify and describe the role and relationship between composed and improvised elements of specific arrangements, such as embellishment or fills at the end of phrases or motifs that are derived from a melody and used as the basis for an improvised solo.

The most common areas of weakness included:

- a lack of basic theoretical knowledge, especially regarding the correct names and numbers for intervals and the correct terminology used for chords
- limited aural skills, including difficulty identifying tonalities (scale forms) and intervals within a melodic context, notating rhythms (on their own) and melodies (pitch and rhythm), both from within score-based settings (Questions 3 and 5)
- limited ability to use the other (not-to-be-transcribed) parts of the printed score in transcription questions (Questions 3 and 5) to assist with the transcription task
- confusion about the structure of chords with 7ths and 4ths, and primary triads
- confusion about or misunderstanding of basic terminology that was taken directly from the study design
- not using the reading time wisely, so that questions were not thoroughly understood and responses were not focused appropriately.

Other concerns included the following.

- Some students did not attempt to answer some of the questions, especially in Section A and Section C of the examination.



- Many students wrote prose answers that were very hard to decipher, often due to illegible writing, extremely blunt pencils, and/or poor spelling and grammar. Students are reminded of the importance of writing in a way that communicates their response clearly.
- Confusion or lack of awareness about the meanings of musical terms arose frequently. ‘Melody’, ‘expressive devices’, ‘phrasing’, ‘rhythmic characteristics’, ‘texture’ and ‘harmony’ were often dealt with inappropriately or incorrectly. Many students approached issues of ‘dynamics’ from the perspective of ‘dynamism’, ‘liveliness’ or ‘energy’ rather than relative volume and/or volume-based relationships. Most students who wrote about ‘expressive devices’ placed them within the context of the use of electronic effects/audio processing devices. Limited understanding of ‘texture’ as a musical characteristic was evident in the majority of instances where students chose to write about textural differences. It was clear that these terms and concepts, which are taken directly from the study design (see Appendix, Music performance, pages 99–102), need to be defined and/or discussed and used more regularly in teaching and learning programs.
- Many students did not appear to know the characteristics/requirements/components of different prose-based response formats, for example, the requirements of ‘identify’, ‘describe’, ‘evaluate’ and ‘discuss’. Only ‘identify’ allows students to simply name or make a list. ‘Evaluate’ requires a degree of analysis and ‘describe’ requires the demonstration of knowledge, especially with respect to salient characteristics, components or elements. ‘Discuss’ requires the application of knowledge to demonstrate understanding, invariably demanding a higher level of insight. The relative marks available for each response type should provide an indication of the level of depth and/or breadth necessary.

Advice

- Students need to be aware of the requirements of various question types (see above) and should practise answering questions of each type.
- Students should use the 15 minutes of reading time productively and ensure that they have read each question carefully.
- Students should write as clearly as possible, especially when notating on a staff. When notating music, students should use a pencil and eraser rather than a pen.
- When undertaking transcription questions, students are advised to do their rough work on the blank manuscript paper provided and then transfer a neat, legible copy of their final response to the space provided for the answer.
- If students do their rough rhythmic transcription work using ‘stick’ notation (stems and flags without note heads) or slashes across lines representing rhythmic subdivisions/segments of each beat, they need to be very careful when they transfer their work across from the ‘rough work’ page to the answer space. Often, students’ work was more accurate on the ‘rough work’ manuscript page than on the staves provided for the answer. It is not advisable for students to write their final answer using ‘stick’ notation unless it is perfectly clear at all times. Dotted rhythms tend to become muddled with this style of notation.
- If students are unable to complete melodic transcription tasks using precise, pitch-based, (modern) mensural notation (that is, the exact notes and rhythms) in melodic transcriptions, an attempt should still be made to express the contour/shape of the melody. Although this approach cannot result in full marks, marks may be awarded for a written expression of the melody’s relative contour. It is possible to gain marks for the melodic transcription question by notating the rhythm with complete accuracy and using a line graph to present a precisely plotted contour of the melody. Nevertheless, if students can plot contour precisely and transcribe rhythms accurately, they are advised to use proper notation.
- Where possible, students should have access to appropriate aural training software and a computer music sequencer, especially to program rhythms, chords and chord progressions for aural training (perhaps improvisation training too) and to realise their harmonisations (for those who select the Part-writing option in Unit 4).

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

For each question, an answer (or answers) is provided. In some cases the answer given is not the only answer that could have been awarded marks.

The lists of possible responses or characteristics are examples of salient points and/or aspects of the question’s components.



Section A – Music language and Aural perception

Part 1: Intervals, scales and melody

Question 1 – Music language – Recognition of intervals

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	3	6	8	18	61	4.2

- Perfect 5th
- Major 2nd
- Perfect 4th
- Minor 2nd
- Major 6th

Many students obtained full marks for this straightforward question; however, some practice is still needed in using the correct terminology. Some responses included Major 5th, Perfect 6th and sus 4th. A large amount of students could not correctly count the distance between the two notes, which was very disappointing.

Students should avoid using a small ‘m’ for minor and a large ‘M’ for major, as it can be difficult to distinguish between the two. Some students wrote an ‘m’ which could not be distinguished as upper or lower case, thus obtaining no marks.

Question 2 – Aural perception – Recognition of intervals and scales

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	31	20	29	11	10	1.5

First interval: perfect 4th

Last interval: minor 7th

As in previous years, students were awarded a mark for quality and a mark for number. Less than 50 per cent of students were able to correctly identify quality and number for both intervals; many students identified the perfect 4th interval (or at least the perfect), but many students were unable to hear the minor 7th interval.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	61	0	39	0.8

Tonality: Mixolydian mode (major scale with a flattened 7th)

It was disappointing that many students did not identify this mixolydian mode.

Question 3 – Aural perception – Melodic transcription

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	3	9	13	16	16	15	12	9	9	4.2



Flute

Saxophone in C

Piano D A Bm F#m Bm Em A F#m G D Bm A Em A7 D

Bass

The overall standard of responses to this question was disappointing. It is still clear that students need more practice with melodic transcription in four-part contexts. Many students clearly did not understand the relationships between the melody and harmony provided (including chord types).

Students did not use the notes of the chords given to them, for example:

- bar 2, beat 1 – B to A (acting as an auxiliary note)
- bar 2, beat 2 – B and D, notes taken from the E minor chord
- bar 2, beat 3 – A is the root note of the A chord
- bar 2, beat 4 – C# is the third of the F#m chord given
- bar 3, beat 1 – D is the fifth of the G chord given
- bar 3, beat 2 – F# descending by a quaver to E of the D chord provided
- bar 3, beat 3 – D and B as quavers being the third and root notes of the Bm chord given
- bar 3, beat 4 – C# is the third of the A chord given.

Students and teachers are advised to spend time on activities that develop students' skill and understanding regarding the relationship between underlying harmony and a melody.

This was an extremely simple rhythm, and it was disappointing that many students did not score highly.

Part 2: Harmony

Question 4 – Music language – Structure of chords

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	5	8	9	9	11	10	15	33	4.7

- Chord 1: 'G', 'B', 'D' (Major triad)
- Chord 2: 'F', 'A', 'C#' (Augmented triad)
- Chord 3: 'A', 'C#', 'E', 'G' (Dominant 7)
- Chord 4: 'B-flat', 'E-flat', 'F' (Suspended 4)
- Chord 5: 'F#', 'A', 'C', 'E' (half diminished)
- Chord 6: 'A-flat', 'C', 'E-flat', 'G' (Major 7)
- Chord 7: 'C', 'E-flat', 'G' (minor triad)

Many students did not know (or could not write) the notes in these chords, and many seemed to be confused about the chord types, which included 7ths. Some of the common errors displayed in student responses included:

- not knowing the fundamentals of how chords are constructed, what comprises them and how they differ
- placing accidentals on lines and spaces of other notes



- confusing the suspended 4 chord by using 1, 3, 4 instead of 1, 4, 5
- writing chords in every block of both clefs, which were often contradictory.

Part 3: Rhythm

Question 5 – Aural perception – Transcription of rhythms

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	11	20	14	12	6	5	4	6	21	3.7

The musical score is divided into two systems, each containing four staves for different instruments: Flute, Acoustic guitar, Bass, and Drums. The time signature is 3/4. The first system shows the original notation with various rhythmic patterns. The second system shows a student's transcription of the same piece, including a triplet in the second staff of the second system.

Many students found this question difficult, which was reflected in the mean score of less than 50 per cent. Some students did not notice the time signature: three/quarter time, meaning that each bar must add up to three (crotchet) beats. Some students lost track of the pulse, particularly in bar 2 between beats 2 and 3 followed by the triplet in beat 4. In bar 2, many students missed the syncopation, thus placing the next beats incorrectly; did not hear the triplet on beat 4, and/or, in bar 3, the semiquaver–quaver–semiquaver pattern.



Part 4: Characteristics of a pre-recorded work

Question 6 – Aural perception and evaluation of the characteristics of a pre-recorded work

Question 6a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	0	2	13	23	28	21	14	4

A list of instruments with a brief description of the role of the instrument is below. Many students were able to extend these descriptions, thus gaining high marks. Other students provided far less detail in their description and consequently received lower marks.

- Bass: The bass drives the rhythm section with a repetitive arpeggiated one-bar phrase with alternate rhythmic and melodic patterns over the second half of the bar (G-flat chord) in section one (crotchet, quaver, quaver, crotchet, crotchet, dotted quaver, semiquaver tied to a quaver, quaver, quaver, quaver, crotchet). This establishes the harmonic support. The progression changes in section two. The bass plays predominantly root notes, and the rhythmic feel changes to mostly crotchets with elements of glissandi.
- Guitar: The guitar operates as part of the rhythm section and provides harmonic rhythm. It defines the reggae feel by playing simple chords (on treble strings) featuring staccato off beats in section one (A-flat – off beats of one and two; G-flat – off beats of three and four). The rhythmic feel changes in section two – the off beat feel continues with attacks added to beats two and four (A-flat, G-flat, F-flat, D-flat – a ‘Hit the Road Jack’ chord progression).
- Drum kit: The drum drives the rhythm section along with the bass. There is snare on beats 2 and 4 (back beat) throughout. There are fills on the snare and toms, usually every four bars.
- Percussion: The percussion adds a lot of (idiomatic) ornamentation, featuring cowbell and timbales.
- Organ: The organ operates as part of the rhythm section. This supporting role adds to the texture with repetitive riffs over the G-flat chord but is not a dominant role, doubling the guitar in section 2.
- Saxophone: The saxophone plays the solo, A-flat mixolydian, and uses major and minor thirds consistent with note choices in blues/funk style. The line features many timbral changes (for example, grunts, honks, and runs up and down the scale), use of a wide range and some sustained notes in the upper tessitura of the instrument. The range of articulation includes legato and staccato using a lot of attack.

Question 6b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	5	13	22	20	19	13	7	3

Some rhythmic characteristics evident in the excerpt included:

- fast, common time
- reggae feel
- side drum (no snares)/timbale on beats 2 and 4 (back beat)
- rhythm section driven by bass. Section one: crotchet, quaver, quaver, crotchet, crotchet/dotted quaver, semiquaver tied to a quaver, quaver, quaver, quaver, crotchet and use of short notes. Section two: mostly crotchets with glissandi and more legato
- frontline horns (section two): four bar phrases, combination of staccato and legato phrasing. Riff rhythm (upbeat) quaver/crotchet, quaver, quaver, crotchet, quaver, quaver/crotchet rest, quaver, quaver, quaver, dotted-crotchet/quaver, quaver, quaver, quaver, minim/minim tied over the bar, crotchet and quaver rest, (upbeat quaver) ... repeat
- guitar plays staccato, syncopated (or off beat) phrasing (quavers), rhythmic feel changes in section two – off beat feel continues with attacks added to beats two and four
- saxophone solo employs a wide variety of articulations and a variety of note groupings, which could be discussed at length
- organ uses more legato phrasing over G-flat chord in section one and choice of sustained patch
- crash accents, especially section two off beats and on the beats.

Most students continue to have a lack of understanding of the music term ‘rhythm’. Some students got confused with melody and texture; however, assessors were asked to consider responses when a student listed a rhythmic characteristic then related to and explained it to melody or texture, then related it back to the rhythmic characteristic, for example, relating a comment about fairly busy percussion to discussion about the rhythm of saxophone solo.



Question 6c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	4	6	11	15	17	15	16	9	7	4.4

Melody

Section one

- saxophone plays melodic material with improvised solo
- A-flat mixolydian
- use of major and minor thirds consistent with note choices in blues/funk style
- runs up and down the scale and some simple melodic phrases using just a few notes
- some leaps, use of wide range, upper and lower registers, slurs and grace notes

Section two

- horn section plays arranged theme/head/riff-based melody
- use of tonic major and minor thirds, flat 7 (blue notes)
- four-bar phrase (with harmony added in third repetition)

Expressive devices

Section one

- saxophone: busy, urgent feel achieved by lots of attacks (articulation) per bar
- dynamics mostly mf, f, and ff
- some timbral variations (especially ‘rasping’ in upper register)
- a variety of articulation patterns and phrases
- notes strongly attacked
- honks, grunts, squeals, bends and grace notes

Section two

- tightly arranged horn section
- use of staccato and legato phrasing
- bass part uses shorter notes in section one than in section two, which has more legato phrasing from the bass. This contributes to a smoother feel of the rhythm section, as do the added attacks on guitar beats two and four

Texture

Section one

- saxophone: solo with accompaniment
- primarily homophonic
- all other instruments operating effectively as part of the rhythm section
- simple accompaniment parts contrast with more active saxophone lines
- simple background rhythmic pulse and two-chord pattern allows for a variety of activity in the solo such as cascades of notes, although the rhythm section has a strong sense of a two-chord pattern. The saxophone ‘flows’ over the top of it, whereas in section two the horn section and rhythm section work together in the sense that the eight-bar phrase of the horn section is played over two repetitions of the chord progression

Section two

- horn section riff with accompaniment
- the arranged riff contrasts strongly with the sense of freedom in the saxophone solo in section one
- more polyphonic

Harmony

Section one

- two-chord progression, A-flat – G-flat over one bar
- guitar plays repetitive chordal pattern, simple chords on treble strings
- organ plays repetitive riff over G-flat chord (use of minor third)
- bass plays repetitive, mostly arpeggiated, phrase with slight variation every alternate time

Section two

- progression changes: A-flat, G-flat, F-flat, D-flat
- bass plays predominantly root notes with glissandi

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- guitar continues to play simple, three-note chords
- horn section has four-bar phrase over two playings of the chord progression
- harmony added to horn section in third repetition of riff at a third above

The majority of students attempted this question, and the best responses were presented in a table. These were generally well organised and well thought out. However, there were many superficial responses, and some students still did not understand key words relating to the elements of music as listed in the study design.

Section B – Aspects of performance

Question 7 – Aspects of performance – Performance environment

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	1	2	5	10	14	20	17	14	8	7	6.3

An evaluation of the performance environment undertaken as part of the rehearsal/learning process was essential to addressing this question. The students should have applied the information gained from this evaluation and demonstrated what they did in the preparation for their performance to maximise the performance outcomes. At least two relevant issues had to be addressed, and at least one of these had to be from the dot points within the question.

Strong responses established a link between the optimal use of the performance environment to enhance the outcomes by the way of ‘doing something’ appropriate and making clear how that action enhanced or optimised the outcome. Strong answers were those from students who went into great depth to discuss the problems with the performance environment and how they went about fixing the problems. Other strong responses discussed the positioning of instruments for effective sound production.

A number of students wrote about how they went about setting up their equipment, not understanding the real meaning of ‘placement of equipment’; that is, they focused on technical setup rather than on creating an optimum sonic outcome within the performance space. Some students identified the problems within their performance environment but failed to discuss how they dealt with the performance environment to create an effective performance.

Ways of responding to some of the issues on the list might include:

- avoidance of ‘fly-space’ above a proscenium stage (for example, play on the apron)
- use of acoustic baffles to try to eliminate or reduce resonant frequencies, false accentuation of frequencies and timbres, etc.
- use of sound enhancement/alteration devices
- use of graphic equalisation
- use and/or selection of microphones
- muting, or perhaps a need to be louder or more strident, especially if practising was done in a very ‘live’ space and then the performance venue was very ‘flat’ or highly absorbent, acoustically.

A short list of other potential issues not on the list may include:

- changing instruments (especially electric rather than acoustic guitar or bass)
- moving (stage) positions of performers (especially for acoustic ensembles)
- audience seating
- tempo alterations
- changes to relative balance between instruments
- drummer to use lighter sticks or brushes, no ride cymbal.

Question 8 – Aspects of performance – Presentation of and preparation for performance

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	3	2	4	7	13	15	16	14	13	7	8	5.9

Most students attempted this question. At least two of the dot points needed to be discussed in the response in order to obtain full marks.

Responses that included discussion of ensemble performance skills that were not on the list may have incorporated some of the following:

- ornaments and embellishments
- pitch and tuning issues
- bends and multiphonics



- use of improvisations
- use of effects
- experimentation with different interpretative emphases.

Effective performance (generally a stylistic consideration) was an important issue in this question. Responses needed to establish that the student had developed performance skills and made it clear that this development was from the realms of at least two of the dot points.

Section C – Part-writing or Improvisation

Question chosen	None	1	2
%	6	50	44

Part a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	14	5	13	69	2.4

Part b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	22	5	8	11	11	12	15	9	8	3.7

Part c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	17	4	7	7	10	7	9	9	9	6	7	3	5	5.2

More students attempted this section than in previous years.

Question 9 – Part-writing

Question 9a.

Many students identified ‘valid’ arrangements techniques and were awarded the marks for this question.

Question 9b.

Basic arrangement techniques may have included:

- instrumental combinations to create different tone colours, densities and/or sonic effects
- issues related to instrumental ‘doubling’
- contrary versus parallel motion between parts, both in the same register and in different registers
- harmonic density (for example, how many instruments should deliver the chords)
- the use of different inversions in the chording instruments in order to ‘spread’ the sonority across the registers
- the role of the rhythm and the rhythm section, known as the ‘groove’
- the specific relationships between melody, harmony and rhythm.

Many students completed this question but did not always relate their response to the arrangement techniques of an arranger. Many students re-listed the arrangement technique but were unable to describe in detail ways the arranger used those arrangement techniques.

Question 9c.

Students were required to describe techniques they used in their arrangement created in Unit 4 that ensured their arrangement was stylistic. There were many superficial responses that did not answer the question fully. Strong students identified the style and made it clear that they understood the relevant aspects, components or characteristics that defined or quantified the style within which they were writing/harmonising.

Considerations, approaches, techniques, elements, aspects and components that may have been contained within descriptions included:

- implied harmonies – triadic, suspensions, quartal, secondal, etc.
- contour – linear, angular, arpeggiated, etc.
- tonality – scales, modes, progressions
- range
- metric and durational issues
- phrase characteristics



- internal or formal relationships.

The following are some of the issues that could have been discussed in response to this question.

Phrasing

- balanced/unbalanced (used in an expressive context)
- legato to marcato (and all points in between)
- contour
- contrasted ranges
- contrary versus parallel motion between parts, both in the same register and in different registers
- general and specific relationships between melody, harmony and rhythm
- use of fermata
- harmonic phrasing
- rhythmic shaping
- issues relating to subtleties of phrasing

Articulations

- accents
- legato to staccato
- ornaments and embellishments
- ghosting
- diction-related issues

Dynamics

- loud/soft
- balance-related considerations
- changes in volume (subito, crescendo, decrescendo, etc.)
- contrast
- layering
- terracing

Other refinement processes

- voicings (especially with respect to harmonies)
- doublings
- textural density alterations (especially adding or removing instruments or voices)
- alterations to ranges of individual parts/voices

Question 10 – Improvisation

In general, students' responses to these questions were much better than in previous years.

Question 10a.

Many students identified 'valid' improvisation techniques and were awarded high marks for this question.

Question 10b.

Possible improvisation techniques might have included:

- call/response
- blue notes
- elaborations, which may have included runs, decorations and melismas
- scale-based approaches, including pentatonic, blues scales, bebop scales, modes, directly diatonic, non-western, hybrid, etc.
- exploring the instrument's range
- imitation/variation
- long tones
- chromaticism
- rhythmic variation/development
- use of silence
- contour imitation

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- thematic transformation
- dynamics
- instrument specific techniques
- textural issues
- augmentation
- diminution.

Many students completed this question but did not always describe in detail the way professional musicians used the improvisational techniques.

Question 10c.

Students were required to describe techniques they used in their improvisation created in Unit 4 that ensured their improvisation was stylistic. There were many superficial responses that did not answer the question fully.

Possible relevant improvisational techniques might have included:

- call/response
- blue notes
- elaborations, which may include, runs, decorations and melismas
- scale-based approaches, including pentatonic, blues scales, bebop scales, modes, directly diatonic, non-western, hybrid etc.
- exploring the instrument's range
- imitation/variation
- long tones
- chromaticism
- rhythmic variation/development
- use of silence
- contour imitation
- thematic transformation
- dynamics.